



Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

Daniel Fish

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LINCOLN'S ENGLISH.

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It is very hard to speak or write of Abraham Lincoln in guarded terms. His story, and especially his character, arouse about all that is generous in human nature. To do him real justice, eloquence needs to be restrained rather than stimulated, else it speedily kindles into a dazzling flame of eulogy. And even excess of eulogy is rarely offensive to the listener. Indeed, so keen is the popular admiration, the common regard for the man partakes so much of personal affection, that anything short of unqualified laudation is apt to be disappointing.

In running through the hundreds of published addresses which these birthday anniversaries have occasioned, one who is familiar with Lincoln's own speeches and writings cannot fail to observe a remarkable contrast. The latter are always soberly restrained, the former nearly always florid and extravagant. The one studiously aims at the accomplishment of a practical result, the other, to the production of a rhetorical effect. It has come to pass that the one American who weighed his words most scrupulously, who was never loose or inconsequential of speech, who seldom in mind or body advanced one foot till the other was firmly planted, has given rise to more hysterical encomium, more frenzied and therefore thoughtless eulogium, to more utter disregard of one good lesson which his example ought to teach, than has been evoked by any other one cause.

Not that I would decry the impulses or the benefits of hero-

worship. I would rejoice to have my country judged by its enthusiasm for Lincoln. Yet the reasons for that enthusiasm, the basis of his great influence while living and the greater love which endures and grows with the years, appeal to me as subjects for earnest inquiry. So I come to study Lincoln, not merely to praise him.

The contrast before noted suggests a theme worth thinking about, though it is too big for an evening discourse. The ablest students of Lincoln have regarded his use of the language as perhaps the most remarkable thing about him. The subject has been treated most fully by scholars and critics, among them Mr. Richard Watson Gilder, whose admirable address here in 1907, has been coupled in print with another essay of his, entitled "Lincoln's Genius for Expression", the two forming a luminous treatise on the sources of Lincoln's leadership.

Very likely the skilled litterateur is more impressed than we are by the circumstance that the boy Lincoln received but little schooling. In one of his brief autobiographies, he said that his school attendance scarcely amounted altogether to so much as one year. Naturally, to one who has passed through many degrees of scholastic training and is familiar with languages and literatures, this seems an astonishingly meager basis for any sort of literary excellence. But not many of this company will very much wonder. It is not so marvellous to us, who are less sophisticated, as it was to Mr. Gilder, that Gladstone, with all his wealth of learning and his prolonged experience as a parliamentary leader, bequeathed no masterpieces to the world, while Lincoln, unschooled, unlearned, unaided

by academic associations and traditions achieved a really distinctive style and left some examples of exquisite English and many illuminating phrases which men cannot forget. We know that uneducated men sometimes do speak with great power; that sustained reflection is more eloquent than the gift of gab; and that profound convictions somehow clothe themselves in convincing words. The clear thinker can always make himself understood if he tries; and that is precisely what Lincoln was and did. The secret of his conceded excellence as a writer and speaker of English lies in his desire and his determination to be understood.

But if the desire came by nature the ability did not; it had to be acquired and cultivated. We can trace, I think, even in his later and most polished utterances, evidences of labor. He never possessed great facility of speech, he never acquired a very extensive vocabulary. Fortunately he had to think before he could dare to address the multitude, a necessity which would silence many a reputed orator. His speech was emphatically that of the common people, and his art was in so employing common words as to fix their attention and guide their thoughts from narrow into wider circles.

The lad learned in that short and disjointed twelve month of schooling to read, to write, and cipher a little, and that was all. But if a boy with that equipment is worth an education he can get it. It opens to him the whole treasury of learning. Schools can help but they are not indispensable. They can save time, but they can save too much of it -- too much for distractions and trifles. This thought calms me amidst the clamor about defects in our schools. A boy nowadays can hardly escape into manhood without learning to read,

to write and to cipher a little. That gives him the means of an education if he has wit enough ever to perceive that he needs it. If he hasn't, he is marked for mediocrity at best and it matters little.

With this slight but firm grip upon the fundamentals, helped out by one trip to New Orleans as a flat-boatman and a little practice in writing (and in speaking too it is said) Lincoln came to Illinois at the age of twenty-one. He had attained also the great stature which marked him from his fellows. Free now to choose his own course, he was yet without an occupation. Hard manual labor, though easily within his strength, tired him excessively. He did not, as Mark Twain whimsically put it, "loathe physical exercise", but as a wood-chopper or a farm hand others, I fancy, would earn the employee more money. His former experience got him another flat boatman's job, a second journey down the great river. Returning, he landed, "like a piece of driftwood" as he said, at New Salem, a primitive hamlet on the Sangamon not far from Springfield. It was election day and they made him a clerk of that function, his first practical lesson in statesmanship. He settled there, all his property having arrived when he did, on his back and in a bundle easily carried.

He was early tempted to become a candidate for office. Genial and helpful, as he was, he readily found favor with his neighbors. They liked him and political advancement, such as they had to offer, was the natural and easy way of manifesting their approval. They sent him to the legislature. Not at the first trial, nor until his powers had been tried as captain of a neighborhood band in a threatened Indian war; a war none the less alarming because it turned out to be bloodless. At the capital he met ambitious men, many of

them lawyers. Measuring himself by them, he dared to become a lawyer too. Already a politician, by the short and simple process there in vogue, he became a member of the bar. In that time and place there was no conflict between the two, since nearly the whole bar practiced politics rather more assiduously than they practiced law.

During the transition period our hero had worked in the mill, clerked in the village store, engaged in business in a partnership which failed, was postmaster and deputy county surveyor. Meanwhile, also, he fell in love and was sorely bereaved by the death of his fiancee, Ann Rutledge, of gentle memory. Throughout these experiences he was adding to his book learning, picking up education, as he expressed it, "under the pressure of necessity." He procured a text book on surveying and soon mastered so much of the art as sufficed the needs of his office. Before that he had obtained a grammar, and here I must tell you a personal story:

The first Lincoln talk I ever was asked to give was dated 1892. In mentioning the grammar incident, which occurred in the days of the Ann Rutledge courtship, (I had been telling my young hearers about that episode) I ventured to suggest that the enamored pair may have studied that borrowed volume together, "the 'I love, you love' of the old configuration tripping to the melody their hearts were beating." It was ventured as a light poetic touch, based upon nothing but the merest guess. Years afterward they found that very copy of Kirkham's Grammar, out in North Dakota in the family of one of the Rutledges. So if it was a borrowed grammar as the story runs, a very common fate of borrowed books befell it. But this is the point of my story. On the title page of the book, between the printed

lines in the handwriting of Lincoln, appears this legend: "Ann M. Rutledge is now learning Grammar."

Thus does the poet in us outrun the historian. Give reign to poetic fancies, young men. They discover the truth oft times where reason is helpless.

Lincoln made good use of the Grammar. It is related that he virtually committed it to memory, but most likely his usually correct use of words owed much more to a natural taste, improved by studious practice, than to any mastery of technical rules. His earliest known compositions are nearly as free from grammatical faults as the latest. Even before the Illinois migration, it is said, some of his pieces were printed in a newspaper, but none have been found. The first authentic example of his style is the address issued in 1832, at the age of 23, announcing his first candidacy for the legislature. It exhibits the characteristics which experience and practice developed into a method of putting things that few have excelled.

The man is now ex-soldier, legislator, lawyer, politician and even statesman, though yet a boy. He was in a measure obliged to "keep up with the procession", to look after his reelections, to see to it that no rival supplanted him.

A very moderate ambition would require so much and he was very far from being excessively modest. He was observant and shrewd, self-reliant and enterprising, qualities which if improved ripen into wisdom and power. Concerned now in public affairs and associated with leaders who were politically active, it was inevitable that he should desire to take a part, and an increasingly large part, in all that concerned the state; locally at first and soon in its national

relations. There is nothing abnormal or even unusual in this stage of his development. Like many another youth he had become a public man and he liked it. He liked it because the situation called into exercise talents and powers the stirrings whereof are delightful.

To keep his place, to preserve and extend the influence already gained, he must march with the people. They had the power to advance or displace him. He had the wit to see that from the first. Hear a paragraph from that first campaign address. This boy of twenty-three wrote:

"Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition is yet to be developed. I am young and unknown to many of you. I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of the county; and, if elected, they will have conferred a favor upon me for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. (he wouldn't have been satisfied with that last sentence two years later.) But if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointment to be very much chagrined."

Such was the peroration of a frank six page discussion of railway and river improvements, usury laws, educational reform and the like, subjects which the people were thinking and talking about. And the "good people" were kind to him. They administered the discipline that was needed, keeping him "in the background" for another two years. Then for four successive terms they sent him as their representative in the legislature and on his way to undying fame.

Largely through his own efforts the capital was removed from Vandalia to Springfield in his own county, and there in 1837 he carried his scant belongings and nailed up his sign as an attorney at law. When he left Springfield in 1861, to reside in the White House, 24 years had passed and he was fifty-two. These had been years of constant striving to make up the schooling that his youth had missed. After his one term in Congress he studied geometry that he might the better understand what it meant to "demonstrate" a fact or a principle. His culture was never broad, nor was it scattering. It was practical and thorough. And it was all directed to one end, the gaining of power to explain and convince. His livelihood depended upon the ability to persuade courts and juries, his interest in affairs of state could be made effectual only by coming into intimate contact with the minds of the plain folks. How best to reach the people, the common sort who by reason of their numbers must decide the lawsuits and the elections, became the natural and necessary aim of his efforts.

Not much has been preserved of his legal outgivings. We know that he was a busy and a successful practitioner, but the fame of a great lawyer at best is ephemeral. Few of them, unless they become judges or statesmen, are long remembered. The modes of their success, the secrets of their dominance, die with the sound of their voices. But of Lincoln's political utterances the record is abundantly full. Its fullness indeed is almost wholly political. It seems to me a most remarkable development of Lincoln biography that in all the minute search that has been so long prosecuted, every discoverable scrap of his writing having been gathered up and ruthlessly printed, almost nothing

has been found which indicates how he thought or felt about anything save public affairs. In Emerson's funeral address at Concord, he spoke of Lincoln as an "entirely public man." The phrase was eliminated from the address as finally published, perhaps because the meaning was not quite obvious; but it touched the point to which I have just alluded. In dealing with the people's business, Lincoln was singularly open and communicative; in all else he was almost furtively reticent.

Such was his reputation, in fact, in and about Springfield. David Davis remarked upon his secretiveness and so did other competent and friendly observers. He had no cronies, none with whom he exchanged confidences that went much deeper than matters of electioneering, unless we except Joshua Speed, his bachelor friend in the early Springfield days. Two or three letters to him give us a glimpse of the writer's inner life, but it is only a glimpse. All save that which his masters, the American People, had a right to know was sedulously veiled. Of course a man of Lincoln's mental vigor must have held commerce with the great verities and the greater mysteries of life. The least of us are stirred sometimes by their immensity and we babble about them; but if Lincoln was so moved he held his peace. Why?

Well, he was intensely practical, for one thing; he could see no profit in wasted effort. He was interested in results and to bring about desirable public ends he must control or guide public thought. His work therefore had to do with concerted public action, not with unrelated or unproductive private thinking. His views upon public affairs were for the public use and, according to his lights, for the

public good. It was his duty and his pleasure to mature these with anxious care and then to so explain and commend them as to convince the people of their validity. This work would be hindered rather than helped by the intrusion of unessential inquiries. No man ever had clearer views of right and wrong, or estimated motives more carefully, but principles, motives, beliefs, had interest for him only as they affected conduct. All others were aside from his business. As to all such he respected the privacy of men's thoughts and scrupulously maintained his own.

A practical man of this type is single minded. Lincoln was eminently so. "One war at a time", was the motto which guided his foreign policy in the rebellion days. "The Union must be preserved", no matter about slavery just now. That announcement kept the union lovers in harmony when emancipation would have set them at war and wrecked the cause. "Slavery must be kept out of the territories." That could be done lawfully he thought, though in the states, where it was fixed, the institution was impregnable. One thing at a time and that the main thing. With him even the right was negligible if the time was unpropitious. By the same token personal opinions about religion, philosophy, science, all subjects bearing remotely or not at all upon political action, were of exclusively private concern.

But he strove mightily to become a successful expositor of the political views which he deemed for the time essential! Those were the subjects of his meditation, the constant burden of his message. To win men to them he perfected to the utmost all his powers of expression. And that answers, I think, two questions: Why the record of his words contains so much of politics and so little

of anything else;and why a body of writings which excludes all literary themes retains nevertheless a marked literary value.

Recurring to the contrast between Lincoln's style and that of his eulogists,I note the fact that he once stood in their shoes. Four years after his term in congress he delivered a formal eulogy upon Henry Clay,whom he still later continued to regard as his beau ideal of American statesmen. It was perhaps the least successful of all his speeches. After noting that Clay and the nation were both born in 1776,and that for three quarters of a century they had traveled as companions,he remarked that while the country was growing great and powerful, "The child has reached his manhood,his middle age, his old age,and is dead." That he completes his exordium by quoting a long editorial, "chiefly",as he says,"because I could not in any language of my own so well express my thoughts." The rest is mainly biographical and rather labored,but the speaker's sincerity appears in that the qualities most commended are those most prominent in his own life story: "All Clay's efforts",he said,"were made for practical effect. He never spoke merely to be heard. He never delivered a Fourth of July oration,or a eulogy on an occasion like this."

And Lincoln never did the like again. It was not in his vein. He could not soar,but must feel the firm earth under his feet,and have the stimulus of a living cause,and catch the thrill of a mutual interest,before his power of speech could freely move.

While Mr.Gilder was here to give the address before alluded to he did me the honor of calling to see my Lincoln collection. In the course of our talk this fine poet and critic combatted a suggestion of mine that our hero lacked imagination,or possessed it in but a

small degree. It turned out that we disagreed only as to the meaning of terms. What I had mistakenly called Imagination he correctly named Fancy. The one implies ability to visualize that which is about to surround a related fact with its accompanying facts, to put one's self in the place of another. Lincoln hit upon an apt illustration of this when he said of Douglas, "He is so put up by nature that he would feel a lash upon his own back very keenly, while a lash upon the back of another man does not hurt him at all."

Fancy, on the other hand, is the distinctively poetical faculty, the ready perception of analogies between the actual and the purely suppositious. It was this feather in the wing of oratory that Lincoln lacked: Fancy, not Imagination. A man who could write to his General in the field, "If the head of Lee's army is at Martinsburg and the tail of it on the plank road between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, the animal must be very slim somewhere. Could you not break him?", certainly possessed imagination in the true sense, as all men do who have, as he had, a keen sense of humor. But the higher flights of Fancy were denied to him. He could feel the humor and the pathos of Holmes' poem "The Last Leaf", while possibly failing to grasp the inimitable beauty of "The Chambered Nautilus."

The most familiar and perhaps the most characteristic example of Lincoln's matured style is the Gettysburg speech. It has been inordinately praised for qualities of which it is wholly barren. It is not an oration. The "orator of the day" was Edward Everett, whose stately and ornate address has been lost in the flood of its own scholarly verbiage. Lincoln's was not asked to deliver an oration, but "after the oration" to "set apart these grounds to their

sacred use by a few appropriate remarks." He confined himself strictly to the terms of his invitation, with the result that the dozen sentences there uttered have become household words.

This brief speech -- so brief that almost before the ears of the throng could be adjusted to hear, the speech was ended -- illustrates in a marked way the utilitarian character of the speaker. It is essentially an argument, a lawyer's brief, condensing into a compact heading a theme which might be expanded indefinitely. And the argument was the same which in myriad forms he had been presenting to the people for nearly three years. It was only a fresh form of his constant appeal that the union might be saved, for the danger was not yet past that the courage and fortitude of the people might fail before the great task could be finished.

The address begins with a series of tersely stated facts. The nation was 87 years old. It was established upon the principle that all men are created equal. Now we are in the midst of a war which will determine whether any nation devoted to that principle can live. The purpose of the meeting is to dedicate one of the battlefields of that war as the burial place of those who had there died to perpetuate that nation. This is fitting, as an act dictated by sentiment, but it isn't enough. We can add nothing to the sacredness of this field. The dead have already consecrated the ground upon which they fell. We must dedicate ourselves to their cause or they will have died in vain. Why? Not that the dead may be honored, but that the nation to whom they were devoted, a government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The eloquence is lost, of course, in this paraphrase, but the argument remains. The brief, in Lincoln's masterly phrasing of it, has the solemnity and dignity, the lift and appeal of a Miltonic poem; an effect which I have not perceived in any equal number of human words. "Four score and seven years ago". Something more than brevity was sought there, the uplift of a Biblical note. "Our fathers" brought forth this nation; an appeal to patriotic instinct. "Dedicated" to the equality of men, a political doctrine more precious than any nation had ever before avowed. These men died that the nation so conceived and so dedicated might stand. "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here", it is what we do that counts. It is for us, not this field, to be dedicated. It is for us to emulate these dead, to resolve that their sacrifice shall not be fruitless; that from them we take increased devotion "to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion". Was there ever uttered a more scorching appeal, based upon a more skillful array of facts? The glory of the nation in its origin, the value of the nation in its purposes, the cost of the nation already paid, the hope for the nation if we remain faithful! An oration, truly, but also a great argument and a needed argument, summing up the multiform urgings and persuasions of the years and all in so few words that a school boy may carry it in memory and in understanding too, and so compounded that every phrase of it is instantly recognized wherever seen or heard. Eloquent, yes, surpassingly so, but eloquent mainly in the exquisite fitting of the argument to the time and the place.

I have heard the Gettysburg speech criticized. "Dedicated to the proposition". Turists carp at this, but the people understood.

Now-a-days we speak of a mining "proposition", a dry farming "proposition", and our motor cars are distinguished as gasoline or electric propositions. Lincoln might have chosen a more eloquent word, no doubt, but none more expressive. The speech was carefully prepared. It was not composed or written on the railway journey to Gettysburg as has been so often declared. But it was not delivered precisely as written. The spoken address, as stenographically reported, in my humble judgment was best in form. The standard version, however, is that written out by Mr. Lincoln himself, shortly after its delivery, exercising the author's right of revision. "Our poor power to add or detract." The word "poor" is not in the telegraphic report, though it appears in the original manuscript. It was inserted, I suspect, to break the alliteration in the phrase "our power", without observing that "poor power" is hardly less objectionable. There are other slight changes which seem to prove that the instinct of the speaking orator was a safer guide to effective utterance than the more critical student of his own forms of expression.

I would like to go on with analysis of some of Lincoln's more famous writings calculated to prove the intimation before made that he often found it difficult to put his precise meaning into words; that he never quite overcame the defects of his early education. But I must not test your patience unduly. It is certain, I think, that he took great pains in writing, not by copying and recopying frequently, but in thinking out in advance the best methods of statement. He was markedly original. No one has ever successfully imitated his style and he imitated none before him, certainly not in his way of saying things. In the days of his senatorial candidacy,

Webster's famous reply to Hayne was in everybody's mouth. You remember its sonorous exordium, through which one can almost hear the roar of a tumultuous ocean:

"When a mariner has been tossed for many days in thick weather, and on an unknown sea, he naturally avails himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude, and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course. Let us imitate this prudence, and, before we float further on the waves of this debate, refer to the point from which we departed, that we may at least be able to conjecture where we now are. I ask for the reading of the resolution before the senate."

Now Lincoln could perceive the utility of a figure like that, but he never had seen the ocean, nor had many of the prairie farmers who made up his audiences in Illinois. Unconsciously perhaps, according to his own notions of fitness certainly, he opened his great speech in acknowledgement of the nomination for the Illinois Senatorship in June, 1858, thus:

"If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we should better know what to do and how to do it."

In these 25 words, three of two syllables and all the rest of but one, he preserved all of the prose in Webster's stately introduction and excluded all its imagery. That was his way. Flights of oratory were not for him. He could not imitate the prowess of one of whom he used to repeat with great peals of laughter this descriptive statement: "He mounted the platform, removed his collar, threw off his coat, shined his eyes, and left the consequences with God."

Much has been told of Lincoln's humor, creating the wholly unwarranted impression that he was a rollocking, merry-andrew.

Very little study of his speeches and writings will dispel that illusion. He possessed a keen sense of the humorous, but his nature and his behavior were essentially grave. In discussing this subject with Robert Lincoln, once, he said substantially this: "If I had not read the biographies, I should never have thought of my father as much of a story-teller. My memory of him is that he was a serious minded, self-controlled and self-respecting man." In the debates with Douglas, which are stenographically reported by both partisans and opponents, there are few bits of merriment, no intended jokes, and only one "story"; not half the apparent effort to amuse which much lighter speakers habitually introduce as a means of relieving the strain of attention. If he had been addicted to buffoonery, as is so often represented, if he had been fond of story-telling and mimicry, if he had ever indulged in such tricks for the purpose of attracting followers, surely the debates, -- stump speeches in every sense, appeals to his own people for political favor, -- would have exhibited him in that character. They do not. Like many other things about him, his humorous proclivities have been grossly exaggerated.

Lincoln possessed, indeed, remarkable poise of character. He was a deep and honest thinker. "He read less and thought more", Herndon said, than any other American. Convictions once formed ruled his conduct. Always a poor man he was not envious of the rich. Never a learned man, he respected learning. Very rarely has any man, emerging from his social stratum, thrown off so completely the vices of prejudice. He was entirely just, condemning none, high or low, without a hearing, nor one class more severely than another. He never exacted from others more than he required of himself. He was as

sound in morals as in intellect, recognizing no differences between ethical judgments and political or legal judgments. His religion, whatever it was, tolerated no double standards of conduct. It was an honest religion, charitable and tolerant toward everything save cruelty and injustice.

My own memory runs back to the time of Lincoln's greatest influence and service. I served under him as a boy soldier of the Union, and recall the dominance of his judgments over the minds of those who stood for the national integrity and against the protagonists of anarchy. I remember when he ruled by a right more divine than any right of kings. Yet I seldom think of him as President of the nation or as commander-in-chief of a million armed men. He seemed to me then, as he seems to all of us now, like a companion, and advisor and friend -- the friend of all who loved their country and by no means the enemy, even of traitors. "Father Abraham", described him truly in the trial days and the same gentle appellation befits the memory of him which the ages will inherit. Not a miraculous creation at all, not a demi-god, not so far above ordinary humanity as to discourage or repel emulation; just a kind, patient, aspiring, struggling man, who by reason of great natural gifts and untiring devotion, yet in spite of great handicaps, became our most useful leader and the best beloved of our race.

Proceeding English

Don't think

Ladies and Gentlemen:-

A man lately called at my office who had evidently passed through some terrible casualty. His appearance was that of one who had sometime enjoyed the fullest measure of physical strength, the memory of which had almost departed. There was upon his face the marks of protracted suffering and in his voice the tremor of broken hopes. He was partially deaf, his powers of speech were greatly impaired and over the empty socket of one of his eyes an unsightly patch was worn. Beneath his coat, in the lapel of his vest, there was a small bronze button, whose significance I well understood. Our business being dispatched, my enquiries elicited this information: A leaden bullet, weighing exactly one ounce, had penetrated and destroyed his right eye, torn its way down behind the facial bones into his mouth, had there uprooted two molars on the left side, carrying away also a large piece of the jaw, and glancing upward had imbedded itself in the palate, from which, weeks afterwards, a surgeon's instruments had extracted it. Thus wounded, he had lain without food three days and upward upon the field of a great battle, whence he had been transported first to one prison and then to another, suffering indignities by the way which for the honor of my countrymen I pass over without description; and being eventually discharged, he had made his way home, there to eke out the mockery of life which remained to him. He was one survivor of an army of two millions of men, of whom more than 110,000 were shot to death on the field and out of which full five times that number have died from causes demonstrably due to the perils

W. Barnes, Pres.

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of military service.

This battle-wrecked veteran was not inclined to dwell much upon his own misfortunes but passed lightly to the recital of various stirring experiences of his army life. It was easy to perceive that in these memories he found at least occasional and partial respite from the miseries of his mutilated existence. Listening to his broken yet kindling utterances, I could not but be freshly grateful that without any of the pain or the loss, I, too, could recall something of the thrill of those electric days; and I said in my heart, as I am approaching the summit of my own life, where I can begin to see the trend of its downward path, I also see that my increasing comfort to the end of the way will lie in the reflection that I was born not too late to have been numbered among the volunteer defenders of the Union. If there be seeming boastfulness in this, be assured that it is seeming only, for I sadly confess that motives which moved me as a stripling of sixteen would be all inadequate now. I mean simply that I count it a blessing to any lad to have been borne along toward maturity upon a great wave of noble enthusiasm such as that which massed 2,000,000 of men around the Nation's banner in the ~~Secession~~ War of 1861.

I am to talk to you for a little while about the great central figure of that war, the Commander-in-Chief of the military and naval forces of the Union, the unrivaled leader of its people and the loftiest example of that patriotism and conscience and faith which

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gave us the final victory. Yet it is not of the services of Abraham Lincoln as President that I wish to speak. That part of his career is the subject of a whole literature, as varied and brilliant as it is copious and inspiring. What I wish to consider with you tonight is not so much the manner in which he met the duties of his great office as the causes, or some of the causes, which cast those duties upon him; and I think that even a rapid review of the first fifty years of his life will show that he did not become President of the United States by accident.

X The early and uncelebrated years of any man's life are the part which is most profitable for study, no matter what he may have achieved afterward. It is there that we must look for the actual man and for the materials which shall enable us to profit by his example. In the case of Mr. Lincoln it is especially desirable that we should secure a firm grip upon the real facts of his personal life and character. Without them the stupendous events with which he was connected will fail in interest and value. It is in men and women that the significance of all history centers. The great men of a state, moreover, are examples of the higher qualities which inhere in the National character. Flgs are not gathered from thistles, neither do petty societies produce lofty manhood. That is false

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rhetoric which sometimes represents great men as meteors flashing across the sky from distant and mysterious sources. The superior man is an evolution from the common life. He cannot have in him that which is not, potentially at least, in the people from which he *has* sprung. He possesses in fortunate combination, with the minimum of their faults, the maximum of their virtues. "The elements so mixed in him," as Shakespeare puts it, "that Nature may stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man.' " And so, if a people would know themselves at their best they must study their great men. Therefore Americans, and especially young Americans, should study Abraham Lincoln,

"One of the People! Born to be
Their curious epitome."

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Of the many professed biographies of Mr. Lincoln, there are but two possessing much value in the direction I have indicated. One of these appeared twenty years ago from the pen of Mr. Ward H. Lamon. It contained some matter highly objectionable to the family and to some influential friends of its subject and I am told that attempts have been made to suppress it. The most instructive parts of it were drawn from materials collected by William H. Herndon, who at the time of Mr. Lincoln's election, and for many years before, was his law partner and warm personal friend and admirer. In 1888 Mr. Herndon, at an advanced age but with competent assistance, gave to the press a work in three volumes which I have read with great satisfaction. It bears the impress of unflinching truthfulness and for that reason it strikes me as about such a book as Mr. Lincoln himself would have approved. It seems to accord to him the high credit of assuming that the plain facts touching his origin, his homely life and possible faults, could not detract from the just fame with which the world has crowned him. The vice of the bulk of these biographies is that they treat him as though he were still living and a candidate for re-election. It has been said of George Washington that to the great mass of the people he has become "simply a steel engraving." The tendency is to idealize all the color out of our most cherished portraits. Even now, while many of his adult contemporaries are still living, the plain face and awkward figure of this strange man are rapidly fading from view. Mr. Herndon's vigorous and candid volumes are well calculated to arrest this wasteful bias and therefore I com-

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mend them. Some apparently well authenticated statements are there made which tend to impair the social status of ^{of a part Lincoln's ancestry.} ~~his~~ ^{ancestors.} They grate upon our sensibilities a little - we are willing that the progenitors of our idols should be poor, but we earnestly desire that they should be respectable. None of these alleged facts reflect in the least upon Mr. Lincoln, but rather exalt him, and there is an element of encouragement in them for the multitude of young men who are trying to climb as he did, without the aid of wealth or family prestige.

x All that we certainly know about Lincoln's boyhood can be displayed in a paragraph. Expansive chapters have been written about the family and about the times and places in which they lived, but there is little in them about the boy. In general we know that for him there was greath dearth of the love and cheer in which the boy life of our time unfolds itself. In his own most confidential moods, the man seldom referred to his childhood as men do in recalling happier days. It is hard for us now, when all the world is but one neighborhood, to appreciate the rawness, the dismal isolation, the utter penury of life in the back-woods of Kentucky and Indiana as they were eighty years ago. It was life upon the frontier of settlement in the center of a continent two-thirds unexplored. There was not a railroad in all the world; a fact whose immense significance we can but faintly comprehend. Travel by land or by water was a wearying toil; for Steam, that weird offspring of the most incongruous of couples, Fire

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and Water, was yet a mere nursling when Lincoln was born. But for the fact that these scattered adventurers were mainly immigrants and therefore connected by slender threads of ^{tradition} memory with somewhat better modes of living, their condition was scarcely more hopeful than that of the squalid creatures whom Stanley found in the heart of Africa. They had almost nothing to represent the libraries, schools and churches with which we abound. They had no roads, bridges, nor dwellings worthy of the name. Their clothing was of homespun, supplemented by the pelts of animals killed for food. The men adorned their heads with caps of coonskin, but the women had not yet learned to trim their bonnet with the feathers of birds, much less with the birds themselves. There were between them and civilization, as we know it, eight decades of the wonder-working nineteenth century.

Thomas Lincoln, the father of the President, appears to have been a man of the restless, roving sort, almost wholly unlettered and rather below the average in mental force. His wife, formerly Nancy Hanks, was of a higher type intellectually, and was possessed of some education. She was able to teach her children to read, a fact which proves her better quality; for but few women of her time and social rank were thus favored. It is a fact, too, which accords with the general rule, that capable men are born of superior mothers. This couple were married in June, 1806, and for a time lived in a mere hovel on an alley in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, where their first child was born. Shortly afterward they removed to the deeper and

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drearier poverty of a barren little farm in the backwoods of Hardin County. There, in a miserable cabin, amid the most desolate surroundings, little Abraham was born, on February 12, 1809. There and thereabouts his first seven years were spent. There were two or three removals, for a farm and a home seem to have been beyond the capabilities of the paternal Lincoln, even at the current price of one dollar an acre. (The only pleasant feature of the region was a small stream called Nolin's Creek, in which the boy fished and swam, and which one day came dear drowning the future president of the United States.) In 1816, the family drifted out of Kentucky into the still deeper gloom of an Indiana forest, for the only way in which Thomas Lincoln could get on in the world was to "move on," like poor Joe in Dickens' story. After a year or more, the ^{Pioneers}~~emigrants~~ were joined by other members of Mrs. Lincoln's family and the "half-faced camp" first occupied was given up to the later immigrants. The new family residence was built of unhewn logs, differing from the abandoned camp mainly in the fact that it had four enclosed sides instead of three. After another year of hardship and destitution, Mrs. Lincoln's slender strength gave way and the nine year old lad was motherless. Nothing can be more pitiful than the pictures drawn of that next cheerless winter. A frightful and mysterious epidemic ~~has~~ broken nearly every family circle. Two of the Lincoln connections had been taken away besides the mother. The boy and his sister but two years older ~~had~~ seen them placed in rude coffins and buried without ceremony of any sort in the damp and chilly autumn woods. The

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cabin to which they returned had neither door nor window, only unprotected openings through the unchinked logs. It had no floor but the bare earth and no furniture but the rudest. There was a bedstead of poles in a corner of the one room supported by the walls of the building and, at the outer angle, by a crotched stick thrust into the ground. The bag of forest leaves upon which Abraham slept was in the loft close to the roof of "shakes" and was reached by a ladder of pegs projecting from the wall. In such a dwelling, in the malarious gloom of the woods, surrounded by wild beasts, frightened by the uncanny delusions of his elders and without the presence of any woman to soothe the inexpressible grief of a mother's loss, the next dreary year was endured. It is said of Mr. Lincoln that a vein of superstition pervaded his whole life. In view of this dreadful boyhood experience, it is little wonder. That tenth year, if we could fully realize its horrors, might well account for that demon of Melancholia which followed him to the grave.

But cheerier times were at hand. Before the second winter rolled around, Thomas Lincoln, with marvelous enterprise, had journeyed back to Kentucky and returned with another wife. She was a Mrs. Sally Johnson, a widow with three children and a most estimable woman. Her advent marked a new and better era in the family history. She managed to imbue the dull and ^{incapable} ~~weak~~ Thomas, temporarily at least, with some of his own energy and pride. Windows and doors were added to the dwelling and a floor was laid. Her own stock of household goods, her

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busy needle and her sunny temper brought comfort to the household such as the orphans had never known. The new mother seems to have made no distinction between her own children and those of her husband. Abraham found a warm place in her heart from the first which he always retained. He was sent to school now and then, in the rare intervals when his father could find no more profitable employment for him, but less than one year measures the entire term of Lincoln's schooling. Remember this most significant fact when we come to notice the eloquence of a man who could thrill a nation with his words and free a race with his pen. Contrast, too, the schools of his day with the affluent opportunities of the boy of 1892, for then it was and there that erudition was bounded by the "three R's" and "lickin and learnin" went hand in hand. But the flame kindled by his mother's teaching never went out. (The ruling passion of the boy was thirst for knowledge.) Whatever crumbs of learning fell to him from the tables of chance he eagerly seized and assimilated. Pages from an old note-book in which at about the age of twelve he was wont to transcribe problems in Arithmetic are reproduced in the biographies - little windows through which we may ^{intuitively} see the patient strivings of an aspiring soul.

I must hurry over the last half of his minority. The life by which he was surrounded was always of the rudest. Log rollings, husking bees, weddings, shooting matches, political meetings and an occasional "revival" made up the staple of neighborhood amusements. Sports involving tests of strength and endurance were common. Alcoholic drinks stimulated the zeal of both participants and partisans,

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in consequence of which quarrels and brutal fights were not infrequent. There are traditions which implicate Lincoln in some of these, though he was generally a promoter of peace and never intemperate. (It is altogether probable that he was as ready in those days to measure strength with the back-woods bully as he afterward was to fight in the arena of intellect.) He early reached a giant's strength and stature. At seventeen he was six feet two in height and toughly muscled. At twenty he had gained another two inches and few men were his equals in physical power. But long before this he was a leader by force of mind rather than of body. He early acquired considerable proficiency in writing. He not only served as a sort of neighborhood amanuensis but he indulged in satirical "chronicles" and even composed rhymes which in that primitive community passed as poetry. Some of those compositions have been preserved but their only value is to illustrate the low tone of the society from which their author was able eventually to extricate himself. Later he wrote essays on political and social topics, one of which was published in a county weekly, greatly to the satisfaction of himself and friends. As these literary activities would imply, he was much given to reading. Books were few but such as he could reach he read with avidity. Two are mentioned as having especially attracted him. Ween's Life of Washington and the Revised Statutes of Indiana. He was familiar with the Bible and with Bunyan's Pilgrims Progress, two books whose solid and vigorous English no doubt assisted much to

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form the admirable style which marks his speeches and writings. All this time, however, his ordinary avocation was that of a farm laborer, either at home or in the service of some neighbor to whom his father engaged him. In the spring of 1828 occurred the first break in the monotony of this life. Being temporarily employed by a village store-keeper named Gentry, he was sent to New Orleans, in company with his employers son, with a flatboat load of bacon and other produce to be sold along the river. Thus at the age of nineteen there came to him the first glimpse of life as it was beyond the woods. Two years later another family migration was resolved upon, this time to the still newer and more promising country of Illinois. Abraham was now twenty-one and master of his own resources, but he remained to assist in the building of a cabin, helped to plant a little crop and to enclose both with the rails which afterward figured so prominently in a Presidential Campaign. Then, with nothing but his great stature, his kindly heart, his native vigor of mind and conscience and an ambition as worthy as it was ardent and resolute, he went out to enquire of the world what it would have him to do.

He was a strange and interesting figure. He had as yet hardly begun to emerge from the coonskin-cap and hunting-shirt period of his life. There were mingled in his constitution a vein of melancholy amounting at times almost to insanity and a strain of mirthfulness rising on occasion to boisterous hilarity. He was not enamored of hard ^{manual} labor, ~~in the burning sun~~. Indeed, some of his early associates

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insist that he was lazy. I know what that means, for I have worked on an Illinois farm myself. It means a disinclination to arise at 5 o'clock in the morning, with fifteen hours of toil behind and another fifteen hours ahead. It means the preference of a book over a backache, or of the luxury of a rainy day above the most propitious harvest weather. All accounts agree that young Lincoln was an indefatigable student, a helpful and welcome member of any family and a leader in all recreations physical or intellectual. He was fond of attending political meetings and the sessions of the court. He had a rare gift of mimicing and burlesquing the crude oratory of the time, whether of the stump, the pulpit or the bar. He was ungainly in person and awkward in manner. There was an inveterate incongruity between the length of his limbs and of the garments which ostensibly clothed them, but he was true, generous and essentially noble. In short, he was head and shoulders above his fellows, not only in strength and stature, but in mental vigor and breadth of character.

After working about for a time on the neighboring farms, he engaged with one Offut to make another flatboat trip to New Orleans, helping to build the craft which was safely conducted to its destination. Returning in the summer of 1831, he became a clerk in Offut's store at New Salem, near Springfield. A little later he became a part-proprietor of the same store. Then, partly through his own lack of mercantile skill and partly through the intemperance of his partner, he passed through the educational process of a failure in business and found himself in debt for more money than he, perhaps, had ever

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hoped to possess. That debt of \$600 (the National debt he called it) was not fully paid until after his election to Congress in 1846, but it was finally paid by himself alone to the last penny. Time will not permit me to preserve the sequence of events during the New Salem period though it was full of significant happenings. There he was post master for a time, as well as man-of-all-work, and village oracle. There, too, he first fell in love, an experience which proves that he was no genius in the ordinary sense, for it is said that your true genius falls out of love as readily as he falls in. It was not so with Lincoln. The love and loss of poor Ann Rutledge and the scar which that bereavement left upon his sensitive heart presents a phase of his ^{life} left to which every normal soul goes out in instinctive sympathy. If any young friend has followed me thus far with flagging interest I could be sure of his attention now, if time would permit the telling of this most interesting of love stories. But you must look it up for yourselves. Death claimed the promised bride and plunged our hero into a gloom but little short of frenzy. In all his relations with women this ungainly backwoodsman was a model of purity and honor, but it is doubtless true that he never entertained for any woman such sentiments as were awakened in him by this gentle and lovely girl. Other affairs of the heart he had, one amusing and one almost tragic, but both were colored, as his whole life was, by this first and enduring love.

At New Salem, too, Lincoln first studied grammar, having procured a text book at the price of a twelve-mile tramp to the nearest

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See Jan. McClure (96) J. H. L.

point where such a prize could be obtained. Possibly the young lovers may have pursued this science together, the "I love, you love" of the old conjugation tripping to the melody in their hearts. At New Salem Lincoln acquired and practiced the art of surveying and had his tools of trade seized and sold on execution by an obdurate creditor. From New Salem he enlisted with a company of his young neighbors as a soldier in the Blackhawk Indian war, and was chosen a captain in that primitive army. Returning from a bloodless though successful campaign, he was put forward as a candidate for the legislature. As a hint of the character of his constituency and of the then stage of his development, I quote one sentence from his opening campaign speech. There were just seven sentences besides this: "My politics are short and sweet, like an old woman's dance." Not so very elevated in tone, perhaps a trifle indelicate; but it was never Lincoln's habit to talk above the heads of his hearers. He was defeated at the election, although in his own precinct of New Salem he received 205 votes out of a total poll of 208. This was in 1832, his 23d year. Two years later he was chosen to the same office and thrice re-elected, thus extending his legislative experience over a continuous period of eight years. Most of this epoch was a time of shifts and ^{di}experiments; a struggle for the means of livelihood and a groping search for a mode of life such as he felt himself equal to but could see no chance of reaching. Even before his first election to office, to the utter astonishment of some of his acquaintances, he had begun the study of the law. Later he occasionally "pettifogged"

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a case in the Justices courts. He was desperately poor, for there was little to be earned. He was deeply in debt, conscious of his lack of education, uncouth in face and figure, disappointed in love, and at times drowned in despondency. But he was honest, sympathetic, helpful, studious and nobly ambitious; and by those who knew him, he was sincerely loved.

But one incident of his legislative career is especially noteworthy, although he soon gained and held the esteem and confidence of his fellows. In order to catch the full significance of that occurrence, you would need to study the conditions which led up to the slaveholders revolt and the memorable secession war. To many of you it will seem almost incredible that Illinois, a state which afterward contributed to the Union armies nearly a quarter of a million of men, should ever have been in sympathy with the monstrous institution of slavery. Yet it is a fact that Mr. Lincoln was more than 50 years old before it was deemed safe for an Illinois politician even to be suspected of favoring abolition. The legislature of 1837, almost without opposition, had adopted various acts and resolves in which the rightfulness and permanency of slavery were at least tacitly assumed. There was no call, apparently, for a declaration of contrary opinions. The great anti-slavery struggle was not yet on. At least the sound of the fray had as yet scarcely penetrated to the new prairie state. It would have been no reproach, even to a professed abolitionist, (which Lincoln was not,) to have remained silent at that time and in that place. By speaking out, so far as common

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sagacity could predict, he would only weaken his influence and damage his prospects. The cue of the politician was to drift but somehow Lincoln could not drift. Alone he prepared a brief protest to be entered upon the Journal of the house, moderate in tone and properly deferential to the reigning sentiment, yet squarely asserting the belief "that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy." Among all his colleagues but one man could be found to join in that declaration. That man was Daniel Stone. Whence he came we know not, nor whither he went, but that one act has given him honorable place in history, for the "Lincoln and Stone protest" is one of the monuments of a mighty and glorious conflict. In a man eagerly desirous of political advancement, as Lincoln certainly was, this was an act of splendid bravery, a magnificent example of sagacity and conscience combined, worthy of the man who twenty-five years later was to rid the land of the evil then so intrepidly condemned.

During Lincoln's legislative term, and largely through his own efforts, the Capitol of Illinois was removed from Vandalia to Springfield, in his own county, and this event fixed his choice upon that village as his future home. He went there in the spring of 1837, soon after his admission to the bar and with very inadequate preparation, entered upon the practice of the law. The Sangamon bar was conspicuously able, but politics rather than the profession received paramount attention. Lincoln was again elected and re-elected to the legislature, but the last year of his final term was clouded by an

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attack of mental unsoundness, perilously near to insanity. The immediate cause seems to have been a complication of love troubles, all perfectly innocent, and no more serious, perhaps, than such as some of my young friends here may be afflicted by at this very moment. But to this singularly conscientious and altogether unsophisticated young man, with his habit of relentless self-scrutiny and his constitutional tendency to the blues, all experiences of this sort were exceedingly trying. He had become engaged in marriage, but the memory of Ann Rutledge, the uncertainties of his financial future, doubts of his fitness to mate with the brilliant, ^{and} ambitious ~~and~~ ~~aristocratic~~ daughter of a proud Kentucky house and beneath and above all a terrifying suspicion that his affection for her was not such as to warrant the marriage, these, coupled with the feeling that he was bound by promises not to be broken without dishonor, produced in him a conflict of emotions in which Reason was for a time virtually dethroned. # The wedding day came, the guests were bidden, the hour arrived. Everything was in readiness, save the unhappy bridegroom, who came not. It was a sore mortification to Maria Todd, but somehow the breach was healed and nearly two years afterward the delayed nuptials were celebrated. # Being myself a mere human being and not a cultivated critic, I confess to a strong preference for those biographies of Mr. Lincoln which give us most in detail these close personal concerns of the man, -how he behaved in his office and in his home, -what his conduct under bereavement and how he was affected by the grand passion

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of love. Few of us can be widely known, but all of us must suffer grief and all of us have been or will be in love. Fame is at most a hope, but life is a reality. A perfect man I could not love. My hero must have some faults or else between us there is a "great gulf fixed." (I honor the name of Washington, but it would be a real comfort to me to know that he had one little weakness. Alas, if one he had it has been forgotten.) The strangest love letters ever written are those of Lincoln. Honesty that dominates love may be trusted and you will find it in this life. This marriage in a measure justified his fears. It was not ideally happy, but whatever trials it brought to him were manfully endured. The closest scrutiny increases our respect for him and sweetens his memory. There was one courtship upon which I have not touched, which has an element of comedy in it. My young friends can study these phrases of Lincoln's life-story for amusement as well as profit, but I must hurry on.

Following his marriage a period of almost fifteen years was devoted mainly to the practice of his profession, interrupted only by one uneventful term in Congress. This was a disappointing and apparently unprofitable experience. It seemed to retard rather than advance his political prospects, a result due to that inconvenient conscience of his which would not applaud the motives which prompted the Mexican war and thus conflicted with the popular spirit engendered by that brilliant exploit. He did not seek a re-election and perhaps did not desire it. His hour had not struck but it was rapidly nearing. In the meantime the process of self-culture through study and

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work and the varied discipline of joy and grief, hope and despair, success and failure, went steadily on. A fair standing at the bar, a wide reputation for integrity, a modest home with freedom from debt and a fair income were all assured. Political occurrences were kept carefully in view. It is said that no prominent man ever read less or thought more and it seems to be true that the books which he lacerated over were mainly such as were essential to the business in hand. Aside from these his studies were of men and events and to the multitude he was simply honest, kindly, shrewd, quaint, ungainly and lovable Abe. Lincoln.

Stephen A. Douglas had entered upon political life in Illinois at about the same time with Mr. Lincoln, but under much more favorable auspices. He was a native of Vermont, educated in an academy, handsome, talented, energetic. To a pre-eminent degree he was possessed of the courage, dash and brilliancy which inspire popular admiration and applause. When Lincoln was yet a plodding farm laborer, Douglas was a successful schoolmaster. The farm hand got into the legislature first but the pedagogue soon overtook and passed him, being successively prosecuting attorney of his district, member of the assembly, secretary of state, judge of the supreme court, member of congress; and when Lincoln took his seat as representative in the 30th Congress, Douglas at the same time entered the Senate. He immediately took high rank among the leaders of the ^hten dominant Democratic party and soon became a prominent candidate for the presidency. Ten years after that

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Congress expired, Douglas, still a senator, returned to Illinois, to urge his claims for a second re-election. It was now 1858 and the troubled conscience of the Nation was again wrestling with the awful problem of human slavery. The various compromises through which it had been so often thrust aside had been broken down and the South was pushing for more slave territory with alarming persistency. The angry episode known as the "Kansas trouble" had intensified public interest everywhere and especially in Illinois, whose people were taking sides in such a way as greatly to increase the difficulties of the mere politician. With one eye upon his wide-awake home constituency, Douglas had refused to co-operate with his party associates in forcing slavery upon the people of the territories against their will. This had brought him into antagonism with the pro-slavery administration and, to some degree, into favor with its adversaries. He could not break with the latter altogether without endangering his senatorship. He could not alienate the South altogether without crushing his aspirations for the presidency. In this most dangerous of dilemmas he had hit upon the specious doctrine of "popular sovereignty," the outside purport of which was to remit the whole subject of slavery in the territories to the people of each to be settled as other domestic questions were, by the local ballot. That such an expedient should have given the slightest promise of success seems incredible now, but it was exceedingly plausible then. Slavery was an existing fact and the constitution was its impregnable

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defense. The South was arrogantly insisting upon its enlargement and each new demand could be stayed only by a new compromise which when made severed merely as a vantage-ground for further aggressions. The Douglas proposal placed slavery in the same category with all other domestic institutions, assuming its rightfulness, or at least placing no ban upon it, and so the South could not reasonably object. For the same reason the pro-slavery element in the North could be brought to its support. It could not fail, moreover, to satisfy the indifferent element both North and South. Indeed, there seemed to be nobody to complain of it except the despised abolitionists, too few for serious mischief and too absurdly fanatical to promise much increase in numbers or power.

Douglas entered upon his senatorial campaign with characteristic energy. Contrary to the advice of their Eastern leaders, the Republicans of Illinois had resolved squarely to antagonize slavery extension and everything that could give it aid or comfort. At their state convention in June they had ~~formed~~^{framed} a wise and conservative platform and chosen Mr. Lincoln as their candidate for the senatorship claimed by Douglas. He had visited all sections of the state in the presidential campaign of 1856 and by his masterly advocacy of Fremont's election had impressed himself upon the growing Republican phalanx as their ablest champion. He had accepted the proffered leadership in a speech as luminous as the lightning and as impressive as the ensuing thunder. Never before had any man probed to the very source and

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center of the slavery agitation and laid it bare to the practical judgment of the common people. Thenceforward there could be no controversy over mere geographical boundaries between slave territory and free. Instead of the lines of Mason & Dixon and of latitude 36:30 North, that speech blazed one broad, straight division-mark in the domain of statesmanship and morals which thenceforth must separate the philanthropist from the oppressor, the patriot from the partisan. It was carefully prepared and resolutely uttered. "I want some universally known figure" he said to a friend, "expressed in simple language, that may strike home to the minds of men in order to arouse them to the peril of the times." He had found it in the Bible and against the startled protest of anxious advisers he employed it thus:

"A house divided against itself cannot stand." I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect that it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction or its advocates will push it forward until it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new, North as well as South."

No mathematical problem was ever more accurately or simply stated, no bugle ever sounded a more resonant call to arms. No man had expressed the exact truth of the case before and none improved upon

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that statement afterward. Twenty-one years before the Lincoln & Stone protest had calmly denounced slavery as both impolitic and unjust. Now a voice of wider range was calling upon men to choose whether that blunder and that wrong should be caged and marked for "ultimate extinction" or be permitted to overspread the land. Mark the prophetic quality of that utterance and the deep significance of the alternative. "I do not expect the Union to be dissolved; I do not expect the house to fall," but we must choose, sometimes, between universal slavery and universal freedom. The Union was not dissolved. Sound policy and common justice did prevail. The house did cease to be divided and the speedy extinction of human bondage in that house was accomplished by the immortal edict of President Abraham Lincoln.

Thus pitted against the wily and powerful Douglas, Mr. Lincoln proceeded, in hunter's parlance, to "camp on his trail." He met him at Chicago and listened to his opening speech. On the following evening he delivered a public address in reply. At various other places in the state this process was repeated while public interest in the contest rapidly increased. At Lincoln's suggestion a series of meetings was arranged at which the rivals alternately spoke to the people from the same platform. That canvass destroyed Stephen A. Douglas, notwithstanding the temporary success of his re-election to the Senate. It left him practically without a following North or South. Once thereafter he was cheered by a burst of genuine popular enthusiasm and only once. That was when broken by disappointment and disease, but with something of his wonted vehemence and fire, he

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adjured the men of the North to stand by the Union and by Abraham Lincoln, its duly elected president.

X If you watch the second-hand book stores assiduously, you may chance to find there a thin octavo volume in black or darkish covers and dimly lettered on the back, "Debates of Lincoln and Douglas." The price may be a quarter of a dollar or it may be three or five times that sum; no matter, buy it. If there are two copies, buy both, for it is a book much easier to lend than to get returned. On the title page will appear the imprint of a Columbus, Ohio, publishing firm, and the date, 1860. Upon an advertising page preceding the title you will find, if it is of the first edition, a characteristic letter from Mr. Lincoln, transmitting, on request of the Republican Committee of Ohio, copies of the speeches "as reported by the respective friends of Senator Douglas and myself, at the time," and closing with the direction that they be printed precisely as sent "without any comment whatever." If it is of a later edition, for there were several reprints in the same year, there will be observed, also, a complaining letter from Douglas, charging unfairness in the reports, and a complete refutation of the charge by the publishers. Whatever the edition, it will probably be battered, dogs-eared and mechanically decrepit; no matter, buy it, and have it repaired and rebound as handsomely as you can afford. Its 268 pages, or such of them as remain, are aglow with the spirit of a noble combat, with the "pomp and circumstance" of a glorious intellectual warfare. In the

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simple unannotated report of that great dissension you will find the truest exposition of Mr. Lincoln's character that has ever been printed, a better portrait of the man than any artist has painted and a truer history of the time than is elsewhere accessible. It is more thrilling than any tale of chivalry or adventure. It is the best text-book of logic and rhetoric of which I have any knowledge. There is no more instructive treatise on mental or moral science, nor in all human literature can there be found a more attractive or luminous exemplification of the power of conscience over cunning.

* In this canvass and in this 48th year of his age, Mr. Lincoln first manifested the full measure of his great intellectual abilities. The Lincoln of 1858 was indeed a marvelous development from the Lincoln of 1837. It is little wonder that the world has come to think of him as one raised up by a special providence as the instrument of a mighty beneficence; but God worked in no mysterious way this wonder to perform. The ripening process by which, through twenty-one years of toilful struggle, the author of the "Lincoln and Stone protest" became the leading exponent of the principle therein embodied, was a strictly natural process. "With firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right," such faculties as Lincoln possessed will never lack employment in God's service. "If Slavery is not wrong," said he, "Nothing is wrong," and by the surest methods, to make that proposition the practical working formula of American politics, was the task to which he now addressed himself. Douglas was at the zenith of

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his splendid mental and physical powers, of National reputation, unrivalled in forensic skill and relentless in his punishment of a foe. No man living could match him in the mere expedients and strategy of debate. In audacity of attack and agility of escape, the proverbial Irishman's flea was scarcely his equal. In the trick of understating or overstating the position of an adversary he was wonderfully adept. By plausible paraphrase he could so twist a proposition as almost to reverse it to the common understanding. In spirit and method he was bold, alert and aggressive. In manner toward his antagonist he was contemptuous, patronizing and arrogant by turns. Notwithstanding the scholastic training and the superior social advantage of the Senator, the backwoods boy and the prairie lawyer had somehow become by far the finer gentleman.

In almost all respects Lincoln's methods were in complete contrast to those of his antagonist. He seemed constantly solicitous to avoid every unfair advantage. The proposition to be refuted was never minimized by his re-statement of it. On the contrary, its force was often seemingly augmented by his habit of approaching it upon the strongest side. Recognizing with the utmost frankness the ability and influence of his opponent, he nevertheless calmly manifested his own self respect. He neither blustered, bragged nor cringed. Deference and dignity were completely joined in the profound conviction and lofty zeal of the speaker. In reading these popular addresses, delivered to great crowds of people, drawn together by the excitement and warmed by the enthusiasm of a hot politi-

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cal and personal canvass-campaign speeches, "stump" speeches in every sense of the term, you will be astonished to find them almost utterly bare of anecdote. So much has been written about Mr. Lincoln's propensity for story-telling and his marvelous skill in that direction, about the singular power which this facility gave him over the people and the great pleasure that he derived from its exercise, that we expect, as a matter of course, to find in speeches such as these a veritable mine of illustrative drollery. There are but two "stories" in the entire series. One is so apt that I venture to quote it. Douglas, early in the canvass, had alluded to his rival as "a kind, amiable and intelligent gentleman;" but later, when the "amiable gentleman" had begun to be exceedingly troublesome, the "little giant" grew denunciatory. Lincoln quizzically protested calling attention to the complimentary mention previously given him and confessing the pleasure it had excited. "I was a little taken by these pleasant titles," he said; "I was not much accustomed to flattery, and this, coming from a great man, was the sweeter to me. I was rather like the Hosier, with the gingerbread, who said he reckoned he loved it better than any other man, and got less of it." There is abundance of wit in these speeches of the keenest and most effective type, but in this respect, as in all others, the utmost dignity was maintained. X I could occupy hours in quoting bits of original and cutting humor by which he parried the not always manly thrusts of Douglas, but I must be content with only one. Douglas had irrelevantly charged Mr. Lincoln with a corrupt political bargain. Lincoln had

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denied the accusation, but, his opponent, without adducing the slightest proof, had repeated it. "It used to be the fashion" was the reply, "that when a charge was made some sort of proof was brought forward to establish it, and if no proof was found to exist, the charge was dropped. I don't know how to meet this kind of an argument. I don't want to have a fight with Judge Douglas, and I have no way of making an argument up into the consistency of a corn-cob and stopping his mouth with it. All I can do is good-humoredly to say that as to all that story there is not a word of truth in it." There are numerous abridgments of these debates. Do not be content with any of them. Get the full report and read it by course. I guarantee you interest, amusement and profit in every page. I am persuaded that in that canvass Abraham Lincoln did more for the cause of human freedom than in the four years of his presidency. In the latter period he simply garnered the crop sown in 1858. Another man might have guided the ship of state through the breakers of war but no other man has ever given the least evidence of his capacity to illuminate the minds and stimulate the consciences of men to the point necessary to stay the aggressions of slavery. (Under no other human leadership could the voice of the people have been merged in that voice of God which answered out of the whirlwind, and said "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.")

x The more attentively you study the utterances of the man, the more profoundly you will be impressed with his marvelous sagacity.

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His intellect was as true as his conscience and that was "constant as the Northern Star." No political advantage could tempt him to yield the right, but with him the right that was impracticable was politically a wrong. Hence there was diversion between Lincoln and the abolitionists. They, looking only to the moral aspect of the case, clamored for instant and unconditional emancipation. Lincoln, on the contrary, admitted and upheld the constitutional safeguards of the institution, but he insisted that it was wrong - "a moral, social and political wrong." One method of treating a wrong, he said, "is to make provision that it shall grow no larger." With resistless logic and consummate skill he pressed these propositions always and everywhere, but he disclaimed all sympathy with those who, too impatient of the wrong, would disregard the practical difficulties in the way of its cure. His broad and unclouded judgment took in its invincible defenses against direct assault and also the certainty that it must eventually yield to investment and siege.

Sustained by the excitement of the canvass and the immediate victory attending it, Douglas was for a time unaware that he had received his political death-wound at the hands of the "amiable and intelligent gentleman" from Springfield. His aggressiveness and astonishing adroitness had introduced into the debate many points of a merely personal and otherwise irrelevant character. All these had been met by Mr. Lincoln with imperturbable good nature and speedily dismissed with some witty thrust which seldom failed to give him the advantage. But before the laughter provoked by these quaint re-

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die away
joinders could spend itself, the multitude would find itself recalled to the momentous questions of the hour. Never was humor more effectively harnessed to a serious purpose and never was a shifty antagonist more resolutely pressed to his fall. Douglas won the senatorship but Lincoln's speeches, printed side by side with those of the victor, "without any comment whatever," became the chief political text book of the republican party in its triumphant canvass of 1860. When the smoke of that greater battle had cleared away it was found that the "Little Giant" was possessed of but twelve electoral votes, while the taller champion had just fifteen times as many. Thus ended the long struggle between these men for leadership, the "thirty year war" between policy and principle; and so passed to the head of this Nation the one man best fitted to wear the mantle of Washington.

It was my purpose to close this desultory talk with some comments upon Mr. Lincoln's peculiarities of style and speech but my time is already spent. Remembering the meagerness of his education and the utter absence from his life of any sort of academic influence his literary excellence is indeed wonderful. The most competent critics agree with the commonest readers that in directness, simplicity and prevailing power his style is unsurpassed. My own judgment is that all in all he was the most eloquent of American orators. In all the qualities which assist to penetrate the judgment and arouse the conscience of the average man he has never been surpassed. Yet

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in imagination and poetry he was strangely deficient. His power lay in an unerring logic buttressed in conscience, sweetened by human sympathy and illumined by a quaint and inimitable humor. Eloquence is reason inflamed, while poetry is imagination kindled. Lincoln lived in the realm of reason and right reason is always justice and sympathy and reverence and faith. Imagination may lead on to newer region of thought but reason must break up the ground and garner the harvests. *A recent book asks: "Was Lincoln a Spiritualist?" Well, hardly. Not unless some ghost came to him in texture more tangible than common, who could look him in the eye, and answer his questions and give a more intelligent account of himself than such creatures are wont to do. ~~The~~ Satan may have been an angel of light, but Abraham Lincoln was never a spiritualist. * I cannot better illustrate the simplicity and straightforwardness of Lincoln's oratorical methods than by a comparison, drawn from two notable utterances. Daniel Webster, in his immortal reply to Hayne, introduced his argument with words behind which we can almost hear the resounding roar of the sea:

"When the mariner has been tossed for many days in thick weather and on an unknown sea, he naturally avails himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course. Let us imitate his prudence, and, before we float further on the waves of this debate, refer to the point from which we departed that we may at least be able to conjecture where we now are."

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The prairie lawyer could appreciate the utility of a figure like this, but he had never looked out upon the ocean and therefore the ponderous roll of its waves could have but little significance for him, or for the plain farmers who were to hear his acceptance speech of June, 1858. Now observe how Webster's poetry becomes Lincoln's eloquence: "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it." As against the eighty-eight words of the God-like Daniel Webster, here are twenty-five, three of two syllables and all the rest of one. The one introduction kindles a pleasing fancy and disperses it abroad; the other summons Reason to her Judgment-seat and calls the passions to order. The one cheers with a fitful and vanishing warmth, the other leads straight to the central and eternal fires. Lincoln's mental makeup could not tolerate indirection or evasion. Like a vice it held him always to the main question. For four years he daily urged upon the people their one duty of preserving the Union. In his first official utterance he made straight for this central point, saying "I do not consider it necessary, at present, for me to discuss those matters of administration about which there is no special anxiety or excitement." His education had been defective; there are to be found in his writings, I am told, occasional lapses of grammar; I have even seen letters of his in which the spelling was distinctly bad, but he was sound and true. Even Douglas, his rival, said: "Lincoln is the honestest man I ever knew." And in his honesty there

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was no taint of fanaticism. To the virtue of truthfulness was added temperance, and to temperance patience and to patience, if not ~~gentleness~~ ^{goodness}, at least goodness, and to that brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness charity; such charity as no other man clothed with equal power has ever manifested toward foes so underserving.

And now, may I not say to the young men of this audience, that there is much in this life worthy of continued study? If I have not failed of my purpose utterly, you will desire to go back to the annals of the generation which preceded you and master the conditions and learn with accuracy the lessons at which I have only hinted. There are lessons of shame as well as of undying honor. It was the time when all the concentrated meanness of this Nation was pitted against its generosity and its chivalry. This humble, patient, resolute and honest man led more millions than ever followed the Roman eagles, through sacrifices of treasure and of blood nowhere else recorded in history, to an issue more beneficent than any prophet can yet foresee. To him more than to any other human soul do we owe the glory of the great peace that now abides in the land, the dignity of our country and the lustre of its flag. And in the stupendous struggle through which these blessings were won this modest backwoodsman was our servant-master, our Citizen King -

"Aye, and his genius put to scorn

The proudest in the purple born,

Whose wisdom never grew

To what, untaught, he knew, - "

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